

A Review of the Mushrooms Make a Healthy Forest Workshop

By Jack Wooldridge

We began our excellent adventure into the world of mycology today by stepping into the Duke Farms visitors center, where the workshop was being held. We and the two other patrons of the event walked into a room where tables covered in materials on mushrooms stood in front of a big screen, on which the presentation was played.

After we had all got settled in, the presenter began. She started by talking about mushrooms in different cultures, and how the red, white-dotted mushrooms from fairy stories do actually exist, and are poisonous. Interesting. In Asia, some mushrooms were seen as symbols of wisdom and thought to bolster the immune system.

She explained how mushrooms are actually an enormous, intertwined net of mycélium, as their roots are known, that sprout a small case which, in the rain, explodes out into a mushroom. Mushrooms reproduce asexually, and send spores out into the atmosphere, in the hopes that some will survive and make more mushrooms.

After that, she went in the many different families of mushrooms, of which there are so many that you can never know all the mushrooms. The most interesting ones were one that was bright blue, that grew on wood and turned the wood blue, one that was tough enough that you could draw on it, and one that was bright white and pretty much guarantees sickness after a few bites.

She also discussed some that weren't fungi at all but were related in different ways. Indian Pipes looks like a mushroom but is actually a parasitic plant that lives on fungi. Slimes are, well, blobs of slime that you can see on rotting wood. They get all over.

After the talk, we headed out onto the trail, where we first went into an area that had been recently mulched, and found quite a lot of mushrooms, including some puffballs (yes, they do puff!). When we had exhausted that area, we headed out onto the trail, where it was very dry and well didn't find so many mushrooms. Also it was buggy and the mosquitoes were biting, so we soon headed back.

I felt the mushroom day was wonderful, and really made me think about these amazing organisms. We are joining the New Jersey Mycological Association!